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ABSTRACT

Since 1971 Edison Junior High School in Janesville, Wisconsin, has developed and used an innovative social science curriculum for junior high students. Process of the Social Scientist (POSS) is a 2-year program for the combined sixth/seventh grade which places primary emphasis on the process used by working social scientists rather than on the content of the discipline. POSS stresses methods, techniques, and ways of thinking, rather than names, dates, and places. Students study geography, history, and political science in their first year, followed by anthropology, sociology, and economics in their second year. The History, Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, Economics, Geography (HASPEG) curriculum is the POSS counterpart for eight graders. The HASPEG curriculum centers around short study units, each dealing with a topical problem or concern emerging from one of the disciplines. The entire program incorporates the innovative teaching concepts of team-teaching, multidisciplinary studies, contract learning, miniunits, teacher-developed curriculum, and process learning. Teacher and student response has been enthusiastic as many students feel that the curriculum is more interesting and helps them to remember more. (Author/DE)

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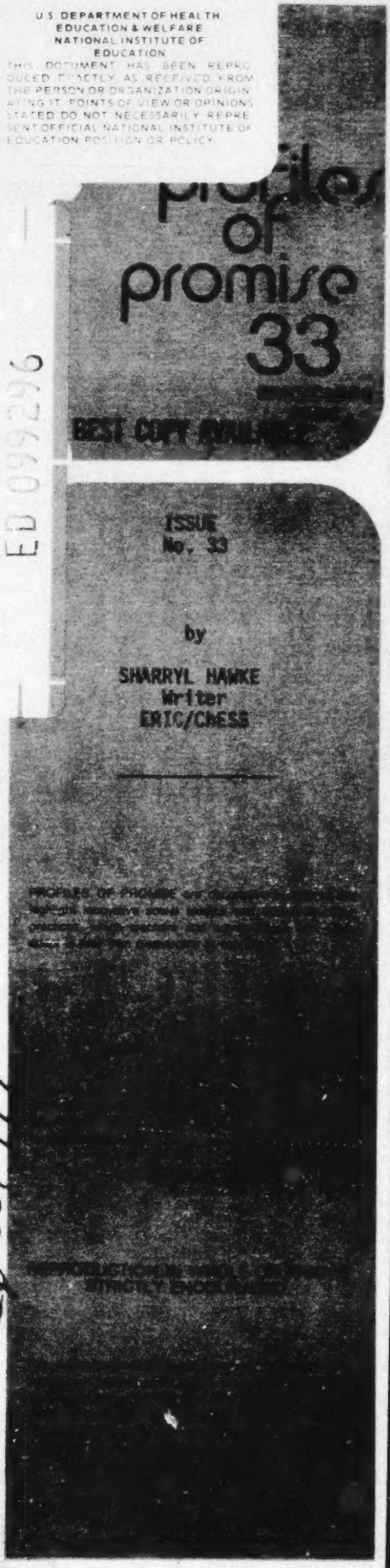

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POSS/HASPEG: Exploring the Social Studies

Reading, writing, arithmetic, and POSS? For students at Edison Junior High School in Janesville, Wisconsin, the combination doesn't seem so strange. Since 1971 Process of the Social Scientist, POSS, has been part of the Edison curriculum for the combined sixth/seventh grade. While essentially a social studies course, POSS represents an innovative step away from the social studies fare traditionally offered junior high students.

Actually, POSS is just part of the Edison social studies package. For eighth graders, the POSS counterpart is HASPEG--History, Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, Economics, Geography. The two programs form a sequential curriculum originated and developed by Edison teachers in an effort to bring new direction and enthusiasm to the school's social studies program.

NEW SCHOOL, NEW STAFF, NEW CURRICULUM

In September 1971, the new Edison Junior High School opened its doors. The physical design of the facility allowed the open classroom concept, piloted in two local elementary schools, to be continued into the junior high level. The building also provided enough space to bring 130 fifth-grade graduates into a nongraded, two-year program.

Since Edison was to have a new staff as well as a new group of students, the time seemed ideal to review the social studies curriculum predominately used in Janesville junior high schools. The administrators and teachers who evaluated the curriculum pronounced it unsuited to the needs of the students who would arrive at Edison in 1971. A complete new approach was recommended.

With curriculum revision in mind, administrators staffed Edison with teachers who were considered sufficiently flexible and open-minded about curriculum content and methodology to be receptive to changing the traditional social studies curriculum. The new staff began meeting to determine the broad goals and general directions for a new social studies program.

One of the group's first steps was to develop a profile of the students who would be coming to Edison. The profile indicated that students would come primarily from middle-to-low income families; many would be ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) recipients; and their average I.Q. would be below the city average. A survey of the youngsters' attitudes toward social studies showed that a majority had negative or indifferent feelings about the subject area.

Using this information, the staff concluded that their new program had to be highly flexible--a program that could provide for individual differences, offer students some choices, and allow variety in teaching methods. They also sought to develop a curriculum that could serve as a "stepping stone" between the problems-approach social studies units used in Janesville elementary schools and the multidisciplinary approach being implemented in the local secondary schools. The POSS/HASPEG program that emerged is based on these original goals.

POSS: PROCESS OF THE SOCIAL SCIENTIST

The program developed by the Edison staff begins with POSS, a two-year curriculum for the sixth/seventh grade. The name--Process of the Social Scientist--suggests the approach of the program; primary emphasis is placed on the "process" used by a social scientist working in a discipline, while secondary emphasis is give to the "content" of the discipline. POSS stresses methods, techniques, and ways of thinking, rather

POSS Geography Project

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POSS Econ Simulation

than names, dates, and places.

To expose students to a broad overview of social science, the POSS curriculum focuses on six social science disciplines. Students study geography, history, and political science in their first year, followed by anthropology, sociology, and economics in their second year. Roughly three months is spent studying each discipline.

Each of the social sciences is examined in three phases. During Phase I students study how professionals in a discipline do their work. For example, in studying history, students consider how historians approach their subject: their concerns, the tools they use, the processes they employ in reaching conclusions. Students also consider the special skills and abilities needed by social scientists.

Phase II is an internship phase in which students apply the concepts ard skills they learned in Phase I to specific situations. Students studying political science might be asked to evaluate the political atmosphere of a time period by analyzing political cartoons from that era.

The third phase, Individually Guided Education (IGE), gives students a chance for in-depth exploration of topics which are of special interest to them. An IGE geography project might be to analyze the relationship between the physical and human geography in a particular region. In consultation with the teacher, each student chooses a subject, determines a goal, and then pursues the work independently; students often work on a contract basis in this phase.

Within the multidisciplinary framework, the Edison teachers develop units and materials. Although some work is done in curriculum development during the school year, most materials are prepared in summer workshops which teachers are paid to attend. Workshop participants develop short study units for each discipline, which include resource materials (sometimes commercially prepared), lesson guides, and activity suggestions. In all instances the units are designed to provide variety and flexibility.

Robert Williams, Social Studies Coordinator for the Janesville schools, has been instrumental in the development of the Edison program. He makes the following observation about the development of POSS:

> *Originally the POSS program was merely a curriculum format including all the social sciences. Through the effort of Dean Ringger and the rest of the 6/7 Edison social studies staff, POSS has become a full-blown, teacher-written curriculum; it is an introductory social science program with the disciplines used as a vehicle to involve students in process learning. Within the POSS approach one finds true concept and generalization teaching.*

HASPEG: HISTORY, ANTHROPOLOGY, SOCIOLOGY, POLITICAL SCIENCE, ECONOMICS, GEOGRAPHY

The HASPEG curriculum differs in structure from POSS. In HASPEG students are exposed to five disciplines (anthropology and sociology are combined) in a single semester. The content of the course centers around short study units, each dealing

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Preparing for POSS Anthropology Dig

HASPEG Urban Planning

with a topical problem or concern emerging from one of the disciplines.

A semster's schedule in HASPEG calls for history first, followed by anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, and geography. Each discipline is approached in a different way. In history, students are given the choice of five units from which they choose one to study; in economics, students form small groups to complete four short units. One of the political science units calls for the entire class to participate in a simulation game. Most of the units are taught by a two-teacher team and last approximately three weeks. Because all units have to begin and end at the same time, teachers must coordinate their plans and activities carefully.

The underlying assumption in the HASPEG approach is that "the methodology of a particular discipline is the best investigative tool with which to view a topic or problem." While the unit "The Kiowa Years" (based on *Kiowa Years. A Study in Cultural Impact*, by Alice Marriott; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1968) is approached from an anthropological viewpoint, the teacher-written unit, "Revolution or Riot," is approached from the historian's perspective. Teachers feel this method of dealing with topics helps students develop flexibility in their own approach to problems.

The HASPEG program builds on the skills and concepts taught in POSS. Students have the opportunity to apply the processes they learned in POSS to the content questions they explore in HASPEG. In addition, the "American experience" is used as a content thread to tie the programs together, particularly the history and political science disciplines.

In evaluating HASPEG, Williams believes an important strength of the program is its format--a format which "has the potential for making both the teachers and the curriculum content extremely responsive to topicalness, to recent developments in the disciplines, and to educational philosophy."

POSS/HASPEG AND TRADITIONAL SOCIAL STUDIES: HOW DO THEY COMPARE?

The POSS/HASPEG program incorporates many innovative teaching concepts--team-teaching, multidisciplinary studies, contract learning, mini-units, teacher-developed curriculum, process learning--to name but a few. What is the result of these innovations? Is POSS/HASPEG "better" than traditional social studies programs?

One question often asked when evaluating a program is, "Are the students learning anything?" Some people fear that without emphasis on factual learning students will remain virtually ignorant. This concern is put to the test each spring when Edison students take a system-wide achievement examination. The first time Edison youngsters took the exam, the POSS/HASPEG teachers were not particularly confident their students would score well since the social studies section of the exam is heavily weighted toward factual knowlege of American history and geography.

The teachers' fears were unfounded, at least with the sixth graders. Edison sixth-grade youngsters achieved the same mean scores on the social studies portion of the exam as their counterparts in other schools. However, the eighth graders did not fare as well when compared with their peers. Results at the end of the second year were the same, with the sixth graders maintaining the district average and the eighth graders scoring somewhat below.

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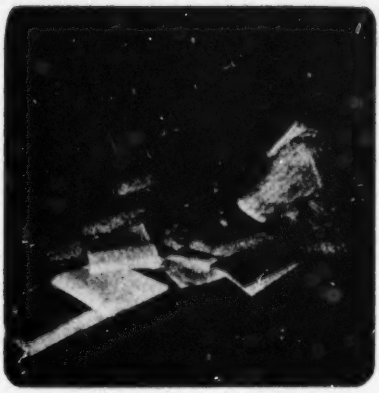
HASPEG Market Game



HASPEG Curriculum Workshop

Another source of evaluation was sought in 1973 when the administration appointed an evaluation team to conduct a general review of the POSS/HASPEG program; the team was composed of lay persons and teachers from other Janesville schools. The team's overall evaluation was quite positive; however, the evaluation team was concerned about the eighth graders' achievement scores and suggested more American history and political science be added to the program. Acting on their recommendation, the staff has added new units in these areas.

Apart from the concern about what students are learning, there is the question, "Do the students like the program?" An informal survey of POSS/HASPEG students produced a decisive "yes" answer. In discussing the program, students frequently mention they like having variety and choice in their studies, not being "chained to a book," changing teachers often, and doing "fun" activities. The disadvantages they mention are primarily a lack of time in some units and a shortage of materials.

These young students see a number of personal advantages to process learning. Several think it will help them in high school and college; others feel they remember more from the POSS/HASPEG course than from their previous social studies classes. Some students state they are more interested in the field of social science as a result of the program and might consider a career in one of the disciplines.

A strong indication of student interest in the program is revealed in the enrollment figures for the elective ninth-grade social studies program which follows HASPEG. In 1971, before POSS/HASPEG, only 37 percent of the ninth graders chose to take social studies; in 1974, with the new program operative, 54 percent of the ninth graders elected to take social science. Perhaps the reason for the increased interest was best expressed by the youngster who wrote, "...in regular social studies classes you are bored to death, but in this class you just get half-bored."

Finally, there is the question, "Do the teachers like the program?" Again the answer is a firm "yes." The teachers are pleased enough with the results of the program to continue developing and expanding the curriculum, adding more units and materials each year. The teachers' commitment to the program is evidenced by the fact that the HASPEG staff has remained unchanged since HASPEG began.

When asked what they see as the program's advantages, teachers frequently cite adaptability and flexibility; they feel the program responds to individual student needs. Like their students, the teachers also enjoy having variety in teaching approaches, seeing new faces often, and working with a wide range of materials.

Edison teachers are practical in pointing out the disadvantages of POSS/HASPEG. The major problem they see is the extensive amount of preparation time required by the curriculum. It takes time to develop units and materials initially, and it takes more time to evaluate and revise the materials. One staff member questions whether teachers can look critically at self-prepared materials.

There is concern in the Edison social studies department about what students are learning. Most teachers quickly acknowledge that Edison students are not learning as many facts as they would in a traditional program; however, they are convinced this disadvantage is offset by the improved critical thinking ability displayed by their students and the wider exposure in social sciences which the youngsters experience.

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SPIN-OFFS

The impact of the POSS/HASPEG program has made itself felt. The other two junior high schools in Janesville have adopted modified versions of the POSS program. At least twelve school systems in Wisconsin indicate that the POSS/HASPEG concept has served as a model for them, and a number of schools from outside the state have requested information on setting up similar curriculum programs.

For social studies departments considering the adoption of a POSS/HASPEG approach, Edison teachers offer some considerations. First, they suggest it is essential to get a good evaluation of students' needs before any program is begun. Second, they feel it is necessary for teachers to be given sufficient time to develop curriculum, preferably in summer workshops. In their view, curriculum development cannot be done well in the midst of a regular school year.

Finally, the question of staffing is crucial. A multidisciplinary approach requires a teacher team whose members have varied social studies backgrounds and a wide range of interests. Team members need to be receptive to the idea of change and be willing to experiment with new approaches. They need creativity and energy. But perhaps the basic ingredient in making a program like POSS/HASPEG work is simply staff commitment. As succinctly summarized by one Edison teacher, "Ya gotta wanna."

ERIC DOCUMENTS:

ED 087 641: THE CASE FOR THE DISCIPLINES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULA FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLING. 21 pp. MF: $.75, HC: $1.50. This document makes a case for use of the social science disciplines as the basis for curriculum content.

ED 084 275: REORGANIZED JUNIOR HIGH PROGRAM 1971-72: A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS. 14 pp. MF: $.75, HC: $1.50. This article describes a new approach to junior high school organization in the Minneapolis public schools, which includes a team approach. A team, working with students, consists of teachers and counselors.

ED 082 410: IMAGINATION UNLIMITED: A GUIDE FOR CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING, UPPER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 33 pp. MF: $.75, HC: $1.85. This guide gives procedures for helping gifted children in upper elementary schools utilize their imagination, particularly in major classes, such as social studies and language arts. Suggestions are given for teachers to help students use imagination to solve problems.

ED 081 226: TOOLS FOR CHANGE. SECOND EDITION, PRELIMINARY VERSION. 64 pp. MF: $.75, HC: Available from Interaction Associates, Inc., 2637 Rose Street, Berkeley, California 94708 ($3.00). This sourcebook provides an introduction for teachers to a new course in problem-solving, entitled Tools for Change. Examples of problems and process-oriented problem-solving are given as an introduction to a discussion of how to teach problem-solving, connect it with other academic subjects, assess student needs, and motivate pupils.

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